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Joint Inspection Unit

Evaluation of UN-Oceans

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly his comments and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Evaluation of UN-Oceans" (JIU/REP/2012/3).

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Summary

The report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Evaluation of UN-Oceans" examines the UN-Oceans inter-agency mechanism, maps out the activities of its members in the last five years on oceans and coastal issues, and proposes tangible recommendations.

The present note reflects the views of organizations of the United Nations system on the recommendations provided in the report. The views of the system have been consolidated on the basis of inputs provided by member organizations of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, which welcomed the report and generally supported its conclusions and recommendations.

I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 66/231 on oceans and the law of the sea, invited the Joint Inspection Unit to review the United Nations Oceans and Coastal Areas Network (UN-Oceans) and submit a report for the consideration of the Assembly at its sixty-seventh session. Accordingly, the Joint Inspection Unit included this topic in its programme of work for 2012. UN-Oceans is a coordinating mechanism that was created in 2003 by the High-level Committee on Programmes of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). It coordinates issues related to oceans and coastal issues, and its membership comprises 14 organizations of the United Nations system that pursue time-bound initiatives, through ad hoc task forces and other international stakeholders, as required. To this end, the report of the Joint Inspection Unit examines UN-Oceans as an inter-agency mechanism, maps out the activities of its members over the last five years on oceans and coastal issues, and proposes tangible recommendations.

2. The mapping in the report of the Unit was conducted to show where gaps existed in the coverage of oceans and coastal issues in relation to the goals of the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg Plan of Implementation)[1] and the Millennium Development Goals. The mapping exercise revealed that 83 per cent of the activities of UN-Oceans members were in line with Millennium Development Goals, while 55 per cent were in line with Johannesburg Plan of Implementation goals. In terms of the types of interventions, the activities of UN-Oceans members are heavily focused in the fields of investment, capacity-building, technical assistance and tools for sustainable development. The report also sought the percentage of United Nations organizational joint activities on oceans and coastal issues.

3. In its summary, the Unit called for the findings, the conclusions and the recommendations of the report to feed into the revision of the UN-Oceans terms of reference.

II. General comments

4. Organizations of the United Nations system welcome the report. They thank the Joint Inspection Unit for providing useful analysis and recommendations and for substantiating key findings on identified strengths and challenges, as well as opportunities for improvements for UN-Oceans as a mechanism for coordination and cooperation. Organizations consider that the overall conclusions are clear and address some fundamental challenges for sharpening the coordination and coherence of the work of the United Nations system in tackling the imperative on oceans and coastal issues.

5. Organizations are also of the view that there is a momentum for oceans as a result of the decision of the United Nations Secretary-General to put a strong emphasis on oceans and their role in sustainable development, through the Oceans

[1] See *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August-4 September 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.II.A.1 and corrigendum), chap. I, resolution 2, annex.

Compact,[2] and of the substantive commitments on oceans and seas made by Heads of States or Government in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development[3] which included a substantive outcome on oceans and seas. UN-Oceans, as a coordination mechanism on oceans and coastal issues, is thus given an opportunity to revitalize itself in order to live up to new expectations and demonstrate its "value added" in effectively assisting Member States in the fulfilment of their commitments at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and in ensuring coordination of the various activities undertaken by the various organizations in the implementation and follow-up of mandates entrusted to them by their legislative and governing bodies.

6. Some organizations note, however, their concern with the implications of the report of the Unit in the management, the operations and the overall costs of UN-Oceans, and whether this may render less useful its purpose as a coordination mechanism. Some organizations felt it was useful to ensure a light, flexible and low-cost coordination mechanism for mandates related to oceans and coastal issues. Some organizations felt that the direction proposed in the report was to render UN-Oceans more institutionalized and, in their view, it would become more costly and less flexible. In this regard, they may need to evaluate whether UN-Oceans continues to be cost-effective for them in the light of the scope of their respective mandates on oceans and coastal issues and the overall cost to their organizations.

III. Specific comments on recommendations

Recommendation 1

The General Assembly should recommend at its sixty-seventh session that a national focal point on oceans and related issues in each country be established, if one does not exist, to enhance communication between delegates of the same country with the various United Nations meetings/entities dealing with oceans and coastal issues, in order to ensure coherence of the relevant national positions.

7. Organizations of the United Nations system support and welcome this recommendation.

Recommendation 2

The Secretary-General, as Chair of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination, should request UN-Oceans to revise its terms of reference, which should be reviewed periodically every three to four years, paying particular attention to avoiding possible overlaps with existing mechanisms and taking into consideration the relevant outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

8. Organizations of the United Nations system support and welcome this recommendation. They note their active engagement in the review of the terms of reference of UN-Oceans within the High-level Committee on Programmes of CEB.

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[2] The text of the Compact is available from http://www.un.org/Depts/los/ocean_compact/oceans_compact.htm.

[3] General Assembly resolution 66/288, annex.

Recommendation 3

The legislative and governing bodies of the organizations that are members of UN-Oceans should, not later than 2013, direct their executive heads to mobilize the necessary resources to establish a small dedicated secretariat to work on UN-Oceans taking into consideration the experience of other United Nations mechanisms.

9. Organizations of the United Nations system support and generally welcome this recommendation. Collaboration and coordination among the organizations are strongly supported. Organizations share the finding of the report that a small dedicated team of staff is indispensable for UN-Oceans to effectively and efficiently carry out its functions. One current member, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, has volunteered to undertake the Secretariat coordination activities for UN-Oceans if so asked. Notwithstanding the formal offer from the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, however, the general consensus of UN-Oceans members is such agreement should be taken after the final decision by the General Assembly on the subject.

10. Some organizations note their concern with regard to the limited information contained in the report of the Unit on the costs that may be annually expected. It is difficult to see how the costs to some organizations will lead to sufficient benefits to them in the implementation of their specific mandates. While there is a need to maintain a clear division of responsibilities among UN-Oceans members, UN-Oceans should aim at identifying areas of international consensus for possible synergies. This view, however, should not prejudice the possible benefits that would be derived from establishing a permanent, objective and neutral UN-Oceans secretariat.

Recommendation 4

The Secretary-General, as the Chair of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination, should, not later than 2013, direct the High-level Committee on Programmes to develop operational guidelines (internal working procedures) for UN-Oceans decision-making, membership, meetings and task force arrangements and clarify reporting and other governance issues.

11. Organizations of the United Nations system support and generally welcome this recommendation. The experiences of UN-Energy and UN-Water offer best practices and lessons learned in this regard. While there is a need to maintain a clear division of responsibilities among UN-Oceans members, UN-Oceans should aim at identifying areas of international consensus for possible synergies. Organizations look forward to remaining engaged in ensuring optimal working arrangements to achieve coordination and policy coherence of their activities on oceans and coastal issues under UN-Oceans.

12. Organizations also note that the High-level Committee on Programmes reviewed the terms of reference of UN-Oceans and discussed the recommendations of the Unit report at its twenty-fourth session held in New York from 3 to 5 October 2012. Organizations expressed their support for the revised terms of reference, which were requested and are currently being reviewed by the General Assembly. Organizations also noted that the Unit report and the preparation of the Oceans Compact build on existing mandates and ongoing activities by organizations of the

United Nations system. In this regard, the World Intellectual Property Organization indicated its intention to join UN-Oceans as a member.

Recommendation 5

The General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session should request the Secretary-General, as Chair of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination, to ensure that the three mechanisms, namely, UN-Oceans, UN-Energy and UN-Water, institutionalize their coordination efforts under the High-level Committee on Programmes.

13. Organizations of the United Nations system take note of this recommendation, which is directed at the General Assembly. Organizations would like to highlight that the three mechanisms, namely, UN-Oceans, UN-Energy and UN-Water, were created by the High-level Committee on Programmes, and the Committee continues to be actively engaged in the policy coherence and coordination of activities of its subsidiary coordination mechanisms, including on climate change. Organizations would also like to note that the Secretary-General had called for the three subsidiary coordination mechanisms under the High-level Committee on Programmes to be chaired at the executive level, e.g., Head of Agency. This is already in effect for UN-Energy and UN-Water. There is a mechanism in the new terms of reference for UN-Oceans for it to be chaired at the executive level, as well as the need for coordination among the three mechanisms. Organizations will continue to be engaged in the coordination of their activities on oceans under UN-Oceans and look forward to providing the necessary leadership and direction for its activities.